




FFU105: Basics of Scoring

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Scoring systems are only limited by the imagination and creativity of the owners in a fantasy football league. You can have an old-fashioned, boring league that only awards points for touchdowns and field goals or you can have an extreme system that accounts for everything from interceptions, return yards, and distance on field goals to suspensions and felonies. You name it, we've heard of it, but most leagues are somewhere in between.

Fantasy football scoring systems fall under four main categories: basic scoring leagues, performance scoring leagues, distance scoring, and finally category scoring. In our introductory class here at Fantasy Football 101, we defined basic scoring leagues as those in which players only generate points when they score a touchdown, throw for a touchdown, kick an extra point, or kick a field goal. This basic system was the first type of scoring system used in fantasy football and is still in use by some leagues today.

The scoring system in a basic league looks like this:

	Points
Touchdown run	6
Touchdown reception	6
Touchdown pass	3
Field Goal	3
Extra Point	1

For the mathematically-challenged, if you had Tony Romo in this league and he threw three touchdown passes you would get nine points. If you had Brian Westbrook and he ran for one touchdown and also caught a touchdown pass you would get 12 points. This system appeals to those who want simplicity from their scoring rules; however, it fails to recognize and reward everything else that occurs in a football game and is therefore becoming less and less popular. In this age where online league management services can do the point tabulating for you, why not add more wrinkles? That's where performance scoring comes into play.

Performance Leagues

Performance leagues describe every other type of scoring system, whereby points are allocated based on the myriad other things a player does beyond score touchdowns and field goals. For example: gain yards. As I've lectured before, a running back who carries the ball 30 times, gains 210 yards, and doesn't score shouldn't be awarded zero fantasy points when the guy who carries one time from the goal line for a touchdown gets six points. In a performance league, justice is served. Players still generate points by scoring touchdowns and kicking field goals, but they also score points for passing yards, rushing yards, and receiving yards. This opens up a scoring system to all kinds of possibilities.

There are three distinct types of performance leagues: those that award extra points once you reach certain yardage benchmarks, those that award bonus points for distance of touchdowns or field goals, and those that dole out points every time you do pretty much anything. The latter of these have been dubbed hyper-performance leagues and include such things as fractions of points for each yard gained, negative points for turning the ball over, and some of the aforementioned, shall we say, more "creative" categories that involve getting into trouble off the field.

The most common types of performance scoring leagues, however, are those that don't take things to such an extreme. These leagues simply add the points scored via touchdowns and field goals and then add points for yardage based on certain levels of achievement. For instance, many leagues give out one additional point for each 25 yards rushing, 25 yards receiving, and 75 yards passing. In such a scenario, touchdowns and field goals still account for a majority of the points, but a 100-yard rushing or receiving day or a 300-yard passing game net four extra points. This has been referred to as a 75/25 league, meaning approximately 75 percent

of the scoring is derived from touchdowns and 25 percent is derived from yardage. If the yardage scoring were increased to one point every 15 yards rushing or receiving and every 50 yards passing, it would be more of a 50/50 league. In this format a 100-yard rushing and 300-yard passing day are roughly equivalent to scoring a touchdown. It is far more equitable to players who do all the work, which is why these types of performance leagues have become the most popular in all of fantasy football—far more popular than basic scoring leagues.

Again, for reference, this is what the scoring for a 75/25 league might look like:

	Points
Touchdown run	6
Touchdown reception	6
Touchdown pass	3
Field Goal	3
Extra Point	1
Every 25 yards rushing	1
Every 25 yards receiving	1
Every 75 yards passing	1

In this league, Romo's three touchdown passes (9 points) are added together with the points he gets for passing yards. Let's say he also passed for 300 yards; that's four more points (300 divided by 75). That's a grand total of 13 points for 300 passing yards and three touchdowns.

Backing up a step, the first descendants of basic scoring leagues and the predecessors to other performance scoring systems were the “milestone” leagues. There are leagues in which players get bonus points in addition to the basic points for touchdowns, but not until they reach milestones such as 100 rushing yards or 300 passing yards. Often times, this was just one extra point at 100 or 300 yards, and then another extra-bonus point for every 25, 50, 75, etc. yards after that.

A milestone scoring system would therefore resemble this:

	Points
Touchdown run	6
Touchdown reception	6
Touchdown pass	3
Field Goal	3
Extra Point	1
100 yards rushing bonus	1
100 yards receiving bonus	1
300 yards passing bonus	1

In one of the slightly more complex types of leagues gaining in popularity, players get points for receptions as well as yardage. These are commonly referred to as points-per-reception (or PPR) leagues and the points allocated typically range from 0.5 to two, with one being the most common.

Other types of performance league scoring variations include points for rushing attempts or completions or negative points for interceptions, fumbles, and missed field goals. But really, it's whatever your league wants to use. If you want to dock a player 10 points for getting a DUI or give him 10 extra bonus points for dating Jessica Simpson, it's up to your league. Do whatever you want. Mix and match scoring systems to your heart's content.

Distance scoring

I alluded earlier to another fairly common type of league scoring system which allocates points based on the distance of the touchdown or field goal. For instance, a 40-plus yard field goal might be worth four points or more rather than just three and a touchdown run or pass or reception might generate bonus points beyond the standard six points for every 10 yards beyond 30. These are widely known as distance scoring leagues, but they are about as popular as milestone leagues now.

A distance-scoring league takes performance scoring rules but adds bonus points for the distance a scoring play covers. For example, a touchdown over 40 yards will be worth more than one from inside the red zone. Some leagues will add a point for every 10 yards that a scoring play covers, while other leagues will add a few points for a scoring play of 40 yards or more. Others may break it down into yardage increments with a set amount of points for each score; i.e. a 41-50 yard touchdown is worth an extra three points while a 51- to 60-yard touchdown is worth four additional points. These types of leagues are a bit trickier to prepare for as the length of the touchdown is more difficult to predict. However, you can quickly determine goal line specialists will rarely cash in on bonus points as most of their touchdowns will come within the 5.

Owners in this style of league will want to look at stats such as yards per catch, rushes for more than 20 yards and receptions of more than 40 yards. Knowledge of who is better at scoring longer touchdowns will give an owner an advantage over some of his opponents, but it's important to remember Lady Luck also plays a role in how far away a scoring play will generate from.

Owners will also want to look at which kickers show a more accurate leg from longer ranges. While place kickers should still get drafted late in distance scoring leagues, the way you rank them likely will be affected.

Category scoring

A fourth, and less known, type of scoring system is category scoring. The first thought that likely pops into your head is that this is for rotisserie leagues, but this same format can also be applied to head-to-head leagues. Those of you who play in a head-to-head league in fantasy baseball will have a jump start on how this works, but here's a quick explanation for those of you that are new to this format.

Like the other leagues, you'll have a set group of statistics that will count for your league. However, in this type of format, points aren't used to determine a winner. Instead, you'll pit your totals for a certain statistic against your opponent for that week. For example, whoever has the most rushing yards for that week would win that specific category, gaining a point for winning the category. Anyone that has played fantasy basketball will have a very good understanding of this format, since this is the standard means of playing for the sport. After the week is over, the winner is determined by tallying up whoever took the most categories.

The nice thing about this league is that points don't get in the way. Where any of the other scoring systems are subjective to how points are given for each particular statistic, this style of league allows fantasy owners to match their top lineup against their opponent's each week and see who records the better numbers in each category.

Another benefit is that it reduces the effect of a top-tier talent on the league. Tomlinson is always nice to have on your team, but he's not going to benefit you much if he isn't paired off with another solid running back. You have to find a way to field stud running backs and receivers to take some of those categories.

The biggest downfall to this style of league is the lack of support for it. Very few fantasy leagues software currently support this format, and the ones that do aren't too well known. This could force some leagues to pretend its 1994, with the league's commissioner using an Excel chart and several hours of his Sunday night to enter in the week's statistics.

Another potential problem is that there are numerous defensive categories that can be used. For instance, most fantasy football leagues use five categories for defensive scoring: sacks, turnovers, defensive points allowed, defensive touchdowns and yardage allowed. With five categories, defenses can account for as much as running backs and wide receivers combined, giving them much higher value than in other formats. There are ways to combat this, though, such as by weighting certain categories. For example, a league could make sacks and turnovers worth just half a category, causing defenses to account for just four categories total.

Bottom line

There are a few things to beware of, though. First, in most cases it is best not to get too carried away, lest your fantasy football league starts posting game scores that are closer to fantasy than they are football. If the teams in your league routinely rack up points that resemble a pinball score, you probably know what I'm talking about. Secondly, be careful when setting up the scoring system not to artificially inflate the value of one position too much over another. For instance, six points for a touchdown pass doesn't really work

if you are still giving just six points for a rushing or receiving touchdown because it makes quarterbacks far more valuable as a group. Four points is fine, but six is probably too many. Where you might also run into this is when you start giving bonuses for distance on field goals and aren't giving correlating bonuses to other positions. Do you really want kickers to outscore running backs every week? Another trap many leagues fall into is getting carried away with the team defense and/or defense/special teams scoring. These points are usually very tough to predict and honestly quite fluky. In other words, if you start giving out points for interceptions, sacks, and fumble recoveries, you should bump up the scoring on the offensive side of the ball as well or else you will have that team defense you took in the last round of your draft outscoring every other position.

Keep in mind that fantasy leagues are constantly evolving. If you don't like your first time playing fantasy football, make sure to look for a league that fits more of what you're looking for. When you consider how many different styles and scoring formats there are to choose from, you should be able to find a league that fits what you want perfectly. Then you'll be glued to your televisions and computer screens like the rest of us on Sundays.